

'Z': he is alive in the Greek people

"Z", with Yves Montand, Irene Papas, Jean-Louis Trintignant, Charles Denner, George Geret, Jacques Perrin, Francois Perier, Bernard Fresson, Perre Dux, Julien Guiomar, Marcel Bazzuffi, Renato Salvatori, Jean Bouise. Written by Jorge Semprum and Costa-Cavras. Directed by Costa-Cavras. Music by Mikas Theodorakis. At the Beekman.

By PHILLIP BONOSKY

It's been some time since I've seen such long lines waiting to get into a movie! The word is out that "Z" is one of the best around, and the fans are right. This is without a doubt one of the best movies in town, and you should see that you get there.

It's a fine movie from many points of view. But I list it high because it takes a political situation (the fascization of Greece) and makes not only a thrilling melodrama of it but extracts from its dramatic brouhaha — which alone would have been sufficient for lesser men to make a movie — the underlying and necessary truth of our times: that, fascism has always the same class roots; only today, wherever it occurs, it's bankrolled by the United States.

This truth is plain, basic, substantive. It's as "universal" for us as some critics (suddenly squeemish) claim are the "universal" truths of Oedipus Rex for all mankind. These critics see clearly the meaning of a play that deals with the politics of Athens and Troy a thousand years ago. When the struggle comes nearer to our times, they suddenly develop critical astigmatism.

"Z" is based on the CIA-inspired murder of the Leftist Greek deputy, Gregorios Lambrakis, in 1963. The rage which his murder aroused in the people threatened to sweep the Greek ultra-corrupt ruling class into the blood-dark Aegean sea. But, "just in time," the Colonels struck; and the new dark night of a thousand knives descended on the body of bleeding Europe once again.

This movie takes the form of a detective investigation. But in the process of tracking down "who-done-it," the real social forces behind the assassination

of the Leftist deputy are uncovered. We see how, why and who engineered both the fraudulent "people's demonstration" against the peace meeting at which the deputy spoke, and the carefully staged "riot" in which he was murdered "by accident."

In the unraveling of the conspiracy—like the old song says—the thungs are connected to the police, and the police are connected to the generals. True, whom the generals are connected to isn't clearly indicated. But apparently, even so, the connections actually made were too much for the suddenly austere Vincent Canby of the Times, who began to yearn, right in the middle of the best part of it, for "art." It's amazing how "unartistic" the truth gets to look when it's not the truth one is looking for...

Actually, the skill with which this most difficult subject is handled, not only by the actors, but by the writer and director, and the cameramen too, is nothing short of remarkable. For the film had to keep in steady focus the underlying political fact that the sheer glitter of the melodrama could have obscured; that it is present-day Greece of which it is speaking, and that today's Greece is a fascist creature of America.

Yves Montand, as the martyred deputy, brings exactly the right balance to his serious and dedicated man of principle — without flamboyance, without self-conscious heroism — a most difficult role. His wife, Irene Papas, true enough, is far more the traditional "weeping widow," and this might have been better controlled. But the studies of the two chief thugs, and the ordinary workers who rise to the defense of the martyred deputy, are keenly seen, I thought, and psychologically sound.

Shades of differences among the supporters of the peace cause were captured skillfully — just enough to convince. And, I thought, the portrait of the leading conspirator, the be-medalled general, who thought Dreyfus was guilty in his time, was quite effective — blending satire with a sound class core. One saw him as basically outdated as the mas-

tadon is outdated, and yet inspired with a cunning and naive cruelty that had behind it the full force of class power.

Yes, this is a picture to see. It may be a long time before you see another one which combines such personal and class forces in a political scheme that has such devastating dramatic power.

Lambrakis, Gregorios

Dec. 11, 1963